December 27, 2002

MEMORANDUM FOR: Jamison S. Hawkins
Acting Assistant Administrator
for Ocean Services and Coastal Zone Management

Louisa Koch
Acting Assistant Administrator
for Oceanic and Atmospheric Research

William Hogarth
Assistant Administrator
for Fisheries

Rear Admiral Evelyn J. Fields, NOAA
Director, Office of Marine and Aviation Operations

FROM: /s/ Scott B. Gudes, for
Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Jr.
Vice Admiral, U.S. navy (Ret)

SUBJECT: Board of Review Report - Fatality - NOAA Ship RAINIER S221

The safety report on the fatality of a NOAA Ship RAINIER crew member in a survey launch capsizing incident last August has been reviewed by me, my staff, and discussed with Office of Marine and Aviation Operations management. I am directing that the following actions be taken immediately to reduce the risk of such a small boat incident taking place again in any of OMAO's and Line Office small boat operations.

(1) All ship Commands and NOAA laboratory managers are to strongly and unequivocally emphasize to all hands that safety is priority #1 for all NOAA operations and shall not be compromised under any circumstances (and especially to collect that last bit of data).

(2) Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs) are to be worn at all times in all small boat operations without exception. With respect to survey launches and other closed cabin small boats, Type I and II PFDs are to be replaced by non-interfering suspender-type PFDs. Working with the Line Offices that operate small boats, OMAO will have the lead in fully revising and promulgating NOAA policy on PFD usage for all ship and NOAA small boat operations. This new PFD policy is to be in place by February 28, 2003.

(3) OMAO will take the lead in developing and promulgating NOAA wide standard small boat operational procedures/guidelines including a universal training/qualification

protocol for all small boat coxswains and Officers-in-Charge (OIC). These procedures will also address the issue of Coxswain/OIC concurrence when operating near coasts. These procedures/protocols are to be in place by April 30, 2003.

(4) Programs are to review the true requirements to operate small boats near shore, especially in the surf zone, for data collection and/or landing/retrieving personnel and equipment. If near shore operations are requested, then the small boat operators (ship's and laboratories) are to meticulously scrutinize and assess all available information about conditions before making the decision to go into a near shore area. Additional personnel and facilities are to be used as appropriate to watch for dangers. Go/no go conditions will be specified in the small boat operational procedures noted in (#3) above.

(5) All small boat safety equipment is to be inspected and checked for condition and currency immediately and on a regular basis thereafter specified in the small boat operational procedures noted above. The initial inspection/reinspection must take place before small boat operations resume after the first of the year.

Several other recommendations in the safety report are being considered and further action steps may be required. In addition, I am forwarding the RAINIER Report to Deputy Secretary Bodman, the Commerce Inspector General, and the NOAA Safety Office and the DOC Safety Office for their review and comments.

[The following message was transmitted via email. Text of direct interest to the Workshop is highlighted.]

MEMORANDUM TO: All NOAA Employees and Team Members

FROM: Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Jr.
Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy (Ret.)
Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere

SUBJECT: Safety Update!

Many thanks to the 800 NOAA employees that recently submitted recommendations aimed at improving safety at NOAA. The over 1,200 comments can be categorized as follows:

Lack of safety awareness by management	16.2%
Noted specific safety deficiencies	11.3%
Lack of funding to correct deficiencies	10.6%
Additional safety training needed	10.5%
Security issues	10.4%
Specific health and air quality issues	8.1%
Ship-board safety issues	7.8%
Occupant emergency/evacuation issues	5.4%
Unsafe sidewalks (at SSMC)	4.4%
Aircraft safety issues	0.7%
Miscellaneous issues	14.6%

Safety issues ranged from such concerns as replacing hydrogen with safer helium for balloon use and replacing small ship two-cycle engines with more environmentally friendly 4-cycle engines, to replacing a crossing light with a stop light, fear about a disgruntled employee, and improved officer on-deck training.

Again, many thanks to so many of you for making the effort to respond to an issue that is critical to everyone at NOAA. There is nothing more important than your safety. Your feedback will now be integrated into a plan designed to address safety issues. I appreciate your work in guiding this effort and will keep you informed as work progresses. Please stay vigilant, report safety concerns to supervisors and safety coordinators promptly – and stay safe!

This message was generated for the Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere by the NOAA Information Technology Center/Financial and Administrative Computing Division

[The following message was transmitted via email. Text of direct interest to the Workshop is highlighted.]

MEMORANDUM FOR: All NOAA Employees

FROM: Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Jr.,
Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy (Ret.)
Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere

SUBJECT: Annual Guidance Memorandum FY 06

NOAA's Strategic Plan presents a vision for serving America in four critical areas: ecosystems, climate, weather and water, and commerce and transportation. The Plan also emphasizes six core capabilities which underpin our ability to serve our nation. It directs us to carry out NOAA's missions in ways which benefit the environment, public safety and the economy. In these ways, the Plan articulates a long-term destination for NOAA.

As we enter the FY 06 programming phase, we need to look closely at all our programs to ensure that our current path will lead us to our goals. This Guidance aims to help us accomplish this task. It builds upon our Strategic Plan and should be read in tandem with it. It sets out specific directions for consideration as we look to the future. It provides a road map by suggesting new approaches we should add to our repertoire, enablers to consider in examining alternative paths, and strategies to help discriminate among a range of possible tactics.

This Guidance also has a second purpose. Events around us continue to shape what we do, and we must maintain our readiness to address new challenges as they arise. The Future Directions set out below provide a bridge between the Strategic Plan and important new developments outside of NOAA.

Key themes which run through this Guidance include integration (at both the organizational and systems levels), partnership, and early identification of the essential support requirements implicit in our long-range plans. Scientific research, advanced technology development and operations remain the cornerstones of everything we do. Our talented work force is our most important asset.

Performance measures will clarify how each member of our NOAA team helps us to address vital national needs. You are an indispensable part of our mission to serve "every American every day."

1. Context for this Guidance

A. The Importance of Sound Decisions

The quality of life of the American people is greatly affected by decisions governing human interactions with oceans and the atmosphere. These decisions are made by governments, corporations and individuals, in response to issues on spatial scales ranging from global (e.g., climate change), to regional (e.g., fisheries management), to local (e.g., response to a tornado warning).

More than ever, these decisions are difficult and controversial. The risk of poor decisions is fueled by (a) population and business expansion in highly vulnerable areas like coasts, (b) competing demands for access to marine resources, (c) technologies that modify the environment in unanticipated ways, and (d) high expectations about public health and safety, environmental quality and ecosystem health.

B. NOAA's Contribution to Sound Decision-making

Sound decision-making by others depends on NOAA's ability to deliver the information needed for objective analysis of alternatives. NOAA's own decision-making processes must be transparent, participatory, and information-based, taking account of diverse societal values. In short, the Nation needs NOAA as an honest broker when it comes to oceanic and atmospheric issues.

NOAA has the capability to lead the way in responding to, identifying, and changing human impacts on the environment, from the headwaters of estuaries and the Great Lakes, through the coastal zone, over 3.4 million square miles of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone, and throughout the global oceans. NOAA has over one hundred legal mandates that give us responsibilities to promote sound decisions, and in some cases place responsibility for sound decisions squarely on our shoulders. Taken together, NOAA's mandates apply holistically because our responsibilities for upper trophic levels (fish and mammals) require integration of atmospheric-terrestrial-water conditions. NOAA has the largest cadre of scientists engaged in marine ecosystem issues of any federal Agency, with a history of more than 125 years of research. We have vast experience in conducting decision-making processes that translate scientific information and public input into public policy.

NOAA also has the capability to support life-saving decision-making in response to environmental conditions. We are

the only agency with a mandate to issue adverse weather and flood warnings. Short and longer-term forecasts assist economic decision-making in weather and climate sensitive sectors such as agriculture. We have the ability to use our relationships with external partners to bring to bear the full weight of our expertise to achieve our defined programs.

2. Future Directions

This section sets out specific directions to consider as we assess our current path and look to the future.

...

3. Approaches

To promote acceptance of decisions made or supported by NOAA, we need to do more of the following:

...

4. Enablers

To move in the directions set out above, NOAA must have a sound foundation in several areas, described here as “Enablers” because they underlie our ability to produce results across the board. These areas must receive attention in every aspect of our programs to ensure that our ability to deliver products and services to America is not compromised.

A. Environmental Modeling:

Sound, state of the art, environmental models are the centerpiece of NOAA’s operational and research enterprise. In particular, they are essential for fulfilling NOAA’s assessment and prediction mission. We should build, improve upon and apply our capabilities for operational modeling and forecasting in support of all mission-critical aspects of atmospheric and hydrologic systems, estuaries, coastal and open ocean, the Great Lakes and living marine resources. This should be a coordinated, comprehensive NOAA effort.

B. Data Management:

NOAA and its customers have a critical need for readily available and quality-controlled environmental data to move us in the strategic future directions set out above. To meet this need, we should develop a comprehensive, cost-effective, NOAA-wide data collection, quality control, storage and retrieval program.

C. Technology:

NOAA is critically dependent upon sophisticated information technology for internal operations and external service delivery. We should move toward a comprehensive and secure NOAA enterprise IT architecture, pursuing a cost effective investment plan. Additionally, NOAA should make every effort to seek and adopt new technologies of all kinds (biotechnology, nanotechnology etc.) to yield better approaches and improved understanding of natural processes and phenomena.

D. Human Capital:

NOAA's people remain our most critical asset. Their safety at work is a primary concern. We should also begin to implement a long-range human resources and education strategy stressing (1) broader interdisciplinary occupational categories in the personnel system and associated training needs (2) changing demographics of the NOAA work force and (3) the link between education and NOAA's future workforce needs.

E. Facilities:

NOAA has a decentralized field structure of facilities often requiring special design and construction (e.g. laboratories or docks). NOAA should begin to implement a long-range strategy that addresses our need for the safe, well maintained and secure facilities that our employees deserve.

F. Platforms:

Ten-year requirements plans for ships and aircraft should be carefully synchronized with the long-range needs of NOAA programs and should take account of new technology to make data collection more efficient and less costly.

G. Administrative Services:

To ensure efficiency and accountability, NOAA should adopt best practices across the full range of our administrative functions.

5. General Strategies

NOAA should institute processes to optimize our current program. Given the current budget climate, we should focus more sharply on integrating our efforts to achieve efficiencies, on redirecting current assets and on building strategic alliances to leverage external resources. Among alternatives, we should emphasize those which provide the greatest or most certain return on investment. We should focus on those geographical areas where

risk is highest or severity of a problem is greatest. NOAA strategies should also take account of: degree to which sound decision-making depends upon the proposed activity, economic importance of resource being studied or managed, urgency of problem or need, clarity of NOAA's mandate in relation to the issue at hand, quality of NOAA's resources and expertise to address the problem, indispensability of NOAA's involvement, potential for alliance-building both within the Department of Commerce and externally, and visibility of the issue.

6. Achievements and Outlook

In recent months, we have put in place a number of important reforms, including goal teams and councils aligned to Strategic Plan goals and cross-cut priorities, a program structure based upon fiscal resources, and matrix management policies and procedures. The power of these changes was evident to me in the analytical team work on which my guidance is based. As background for this Memorandum, each of the four NOAA Goal Teams produced papers identifying urgent national needs in their mission areas, relevant NOAA capabilities, and criteria for setting program priorities. I congratulate them for adopting an unprecedented, high-level, corporate perspective during their deliberations.

NOAA Goal Teams and Councils should support Program Managers to help ensure that our future directions and approaches, cross-cutting priorities and long-range support requirements are factored into programming decisions. NOAA must continue to evolve to serve the rapidly changing world of which we are part. I have asked that the Strategic Plan be revisited to identify any necessary updates in light of this guidance and its analytical underpinnings.

With this guidance and our new management principles, the NOAA team can serve America with distinction as we face the challenges of the 21st century.
